

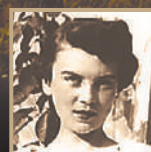
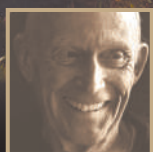
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LEGENDS MAGAZINE

2014 AVIATOR LEGENDS

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from this year's thirteen
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A special publication of
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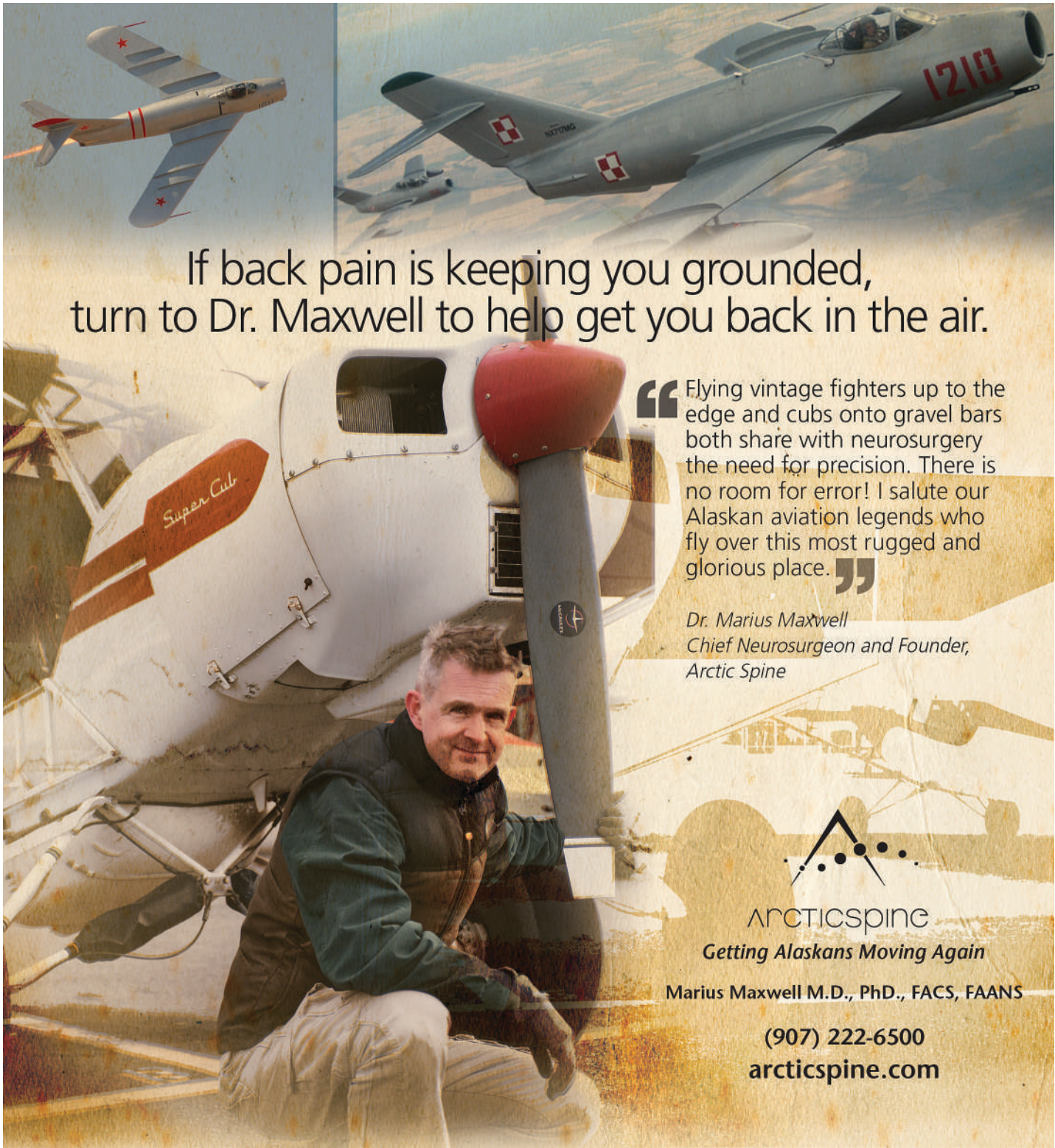


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Lake Hood, Photo by Rob Stapleton

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Aviation Pioneers

BY ROB STAPLETON



In your hands is documentation of hundreds of years of aviation experience as lived by 13 true pioneers of Alaska. These pioneers used various types of aircraft as transportation to live a lifestyle that many can only dream of.

The intent of the Alaska Aviation Legends project is to record as much history of each candidate and their adventures "the best as they can recall." This process was chosen in hopes of eliminating mistakes and factual errors for future historians.

Yes, there will be mistakes because not everyone remembers events in their past in as much detail as others observing from the sidelines, who were not making choices and acting to prevail. The hope of this project is to honor each Legend and tell their story while alive, gather historic images, video and artifacts that are of relevance to their Alaskan aviation lifestyle.

Writers Joy Journeay, Jane Dale and I, interviewed each Legend candidate as assigned in hopes of offering readers a snapshot of each person's life and their use of aircraft.

Hunting, fishing, running airlines, public safety, manufacturing of aircraft, or just for access, all flew over Alaska traversing vast areas of mountains, lakes, glaciers and tundra where no roads exist.

In this group are several women who embraced meager conditions and made the best effort to enjoy life on a daily, monthly, yearly basis no matter what the challenge—in fact they thrived. The men in this year's Legends vary from military pilots, a doctor, a public safety officer, airline entrepreneurs, game guides and an aircraft manufacturer.

Because Alaska has a very high population of pilots per capita, each story offers some detailed aviation nomenclature and

abbreviations. We have, where possible, eliminated or identified the usual acronyms by spelling them out.

During the development of the stories and interviews, many have asked about how Alaska Aviation Legends are chosen...well it's simple; it's done by their peers.

Each Legend was chosen by fellow aviators, friends and family by nominations. Late in the year the nominations are gathered and reviewed by a committee of Alaskans with extensive aviation and geographic knowledge of Alaska.

Legends are chosen first by age to offer the elder most persons into the group. Younger nominees are decided by the amount of people who have nominated them or by recommendation of previously honored legends.

In January, the Legends are chosen and a letter of congratulation is sent to each Legend with details about the process and interviews are agreed to, and set.

The 2014 Alaska Aviation Legends project offers the stories and experiences of these pioneers. While the stories are engaging, each writer worked closely with the subjects to drill down and obtain nuggets of information that could be weaved into a biographical type of story. Using the Legends, their friends and fellow pilots, each story emerges with rich detail of a life in Alaska that would not be possible without the use of aircraft.

Please enjoy this publication the writers and the staff of the Alaska Dispatch News are proud to present this Alaskan aviation history for you.

Regards,

Rob Stapleton, Jr.

Editor/Photographer

2014

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ON THE COVER

C206 Float plane on Lake Hood
Photo by Rob Stapleton

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— The residents of Northwest Alaska



Walt Audi

PILOT OF THE FAR NORTH

By Joy Journey

Walt Audi came to Alaska in 1962 “to see what was possible” and discovered all he wanted. By 1964, he was living north of the 70 degrees latitude, and has continued to serve the people of northern Alaska ever since.

“If I was going to write a book about my life, I’d entitle it *Fifty Years Above 70 North*,” he says with a chuckle.

Walt is a quiet man of few words, characterized by a simple, direct approach to life. He was born at home in Wesley Chapel, Pa., a small place outside of Jonestown.

Audi joined the military and served his country in the 82nd Airborne from 1956 through 1959.

“After my military service, I returned to California. On a hot summer day while I was in college, I lay over a stairway welding girders with the sweat running down into my eyes. I said to myself, ‘The heck with this!’ and I bought an old Ford pickup and headed north,” Audi recalls. “I decided to go to Alaska just to see what was possible. When I got to Anchorage, they were fishing off the bridge right in downtown, and I thought, ‘This is it!’”

In February of 1964, Audi came back north with a pickup pulling a mobile home trailer, in hopes that it would become his first home in Alaska.

“Instead, it started to jackknife going down a hill in front of an approaching car, I went into the ditch to save the oncoming traffic. The trailer was damaged too much to continue to Alaska, so I had to have it towed and stored for a year at Whitsnel in Canada,” Audi said. “I had no choice but to continue north without my future

living quarters. Fortunately, my first job was at Creamer’s Dairy in Fairbanks, owned by Charlie and Anna Creamer, and they provided living quarters. I was hired to do maintenance at Creamer’s, but it seemed like I spent a lot of my time milking cows!”

In June of 1964, Audi was offered a job to work maintenance on the Distance Early Warning (DEW) Line out of Barter Island. It was a 30-day temporary job, doing repairs and work on the fiberglass of the big ray dome. The DEW Line consisted of 63 radar stations, extending over 6,200 miles across the northern Arctic, from western Alaska to Baffin Island in northeastern Canada.

Strict policy at the time enforced that military and contractors were not to even visit villages, but were to stay at all times on the military outposts.

“I did not want to be away from my family, so I took the initiative and went to the Kaktovik village elders,” explained Audi. “I spoke with village elder Isaac and soon I, a white man, was adopted by the villagers of Kaktovik. I then radioed my superintendent in New Jersey and put it on the table for him: I wanted approval to move my family north. I remember that he was dumbfounded, but I got that permission! We were the first whites to live in Kaktovik.”

“There was no electricity, no fire wood, no heat, and no water when my family came north. And it was a pretty big adjustment for anyone to make,” he recalled. “My wife sure tried with the little kids. The village did not have access to oil until it started to be



Walt Audi served during his military service in the 82nd Airborne U.S. Army.

Born

July 19, 1939

Birthplace

Wesley Chapel, Pennsylvania

Came to Alaska

1962

Aircraft Flown

Taylorcraft
Cessna 185
Cessna 207
DC-3

Aviation Companies

Audi Air
Alaskan Flyers

Below: **Walt Audi** with the 207 he bought in 1979.



*“If I was going to write a book about my life, I’d entitle it **Fifty Years Above 70 North**.”*



Walt Audi on a bright summer day June 25, 1997, on the North Slope, more than 30 years after coming to Kaktovik.

delivered north for the DEW Line, and they started allowing us access to heating oil.”

On trips across the North, Audi enjoyed stories of pilots. The reality of

being isolated in the far north was that only pilots could come and go as they pleased and that reality made him hungry to fly. In 1968, Audi started flying by taking lessons in Troutdale, Ore., and eventually received a private license. Each year thereafter, he returned and got another certificate—instrument rating, commercial, ATP, A&P and then an IA.

“That winter I bought my first plane, a Taylorcraft, for \$4,000 and it came with floats, wheels and skis,” said Audi. “Cy Ethrington, from Manley Hot Springs, sold it to me. It had no instruments except that I could tell my airspeed and rate of climb. There was a compass, but that far north it was virtually useless. And the plane had no radio.”

One time when Audi was working on his plane he was met with a big surprise.

“In the winter I was working in the engine compartment and had come out of the plane to get something from

the truck. I found what I needed and headed back to the plane,” said Audi. “Raising my eyes in time to see a polar bear standing right there in front of me. I chose to return directly to the truck! Bears from time to time rubbed and scratched on the house in Kaktovik over the years, so we were used to their presence.”

When the government deregulated the airlines in 1972, Audi was one of the first to apply for a certificate. His friends and neighbors helped him build Audi Air into a multi-city operation over the years.

Audi Enterprises was formed with that first Part 135 certificate.

“I was flying to serve the people on the North Slope and had as much work as I could handle,” he said. “Our charters were flying everything imaginable, as supplies had to be flown north for everything that needed to be done. We operated Cessna 207s, Navajos, and DC-3s.”

Soon after, Audi Air was formed the

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William H. Ragle MD

Aviation Medical Examiner

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center of the operations was moved to Fairbanks at North Pole.

"We provided the first scheduled service to Barrow. We soon had bases at Kaktovik, Fort Yukon, Galena, Prudhoe Bay, and Fairbanks, where we operated from facilities at Metro Field," Audi explained. "We had over 100 employees and operated 29 aircraft. We routinely made three trips to Barrow in a day. We served at the same time that Air North, Johnny Olson and Wrights were flying. Bobby Fisher was the first to fly at Barrow, then called Mike Air."

In 1989 the Audi's sold the 401 certificate, the Part 121 Audi Air operation, to Cliff Everts to haul bypass mail to Prudhoe Bay and then on to Barter Island.

But flying was in his blood and Audi started another aviation com-

pany, Alaska Flyers.

"We did a lot of remote North Slope flying from Kaktovik with our small company, Alaska Flyers," said Audi. Alaska Flyers was known nationally for its flights into the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and getting climbers

"There was a compass, but that far north it was virtually useless. And the plane had no radio."

into the backcountry of the Brooks Range.

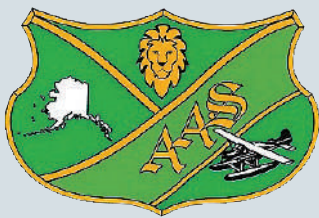
Now Audi has settled down a bit, but not completely.

"We have been agents for Cape Smythe for years in Kaktovik, then for Era Aviation, as Cape Smythe was sold, and now Merylin and I continue to be agents for Ravn Alaska when Era evolved to a new name," said Audi.



Walt Audi looking sharp in his uniform as a young boy.

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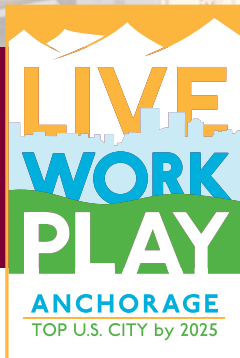
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Albert Ball, Sr.

ADVENTUROUS SPIRIT

By Joy Journeyay



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BALL FAMILY

Albert Ball, Sr. was selected as an Alaska Aviation Legend, but he passed away April 10, 2014, before he could be recognized publicly. He was 99-years-old. This year's *Alaska Aviation Legend* program is dedicated to Albert Ball, Sr. and his adventurous spirit.

Albert moved to Alaska in 1931 at the age of 16, joining his uncle in Aleknagik. Along with his brother-in-law, Myron Moran, Albert formed Western Alaska Airlines in 1953, operating out of Dillingham and serving the western part of the Aleutian Islands and Bristol Bay.

Western Alaska Airlines was one of the first distribution carriers for the Alaska Star newspaper. They operated the airline for 20 years and then merged with Kodiak Airways in 1973 to become Kodiak-Western Airlines.

Albert taught his sons to fly, and three of the boys (Newt, Burt, and Jerry) established Ball Brothers, Inc. They operated a fleet of large cargo planes to transport fresh fish to processors. The Ball Brothers' planes operated from the hard packed sand beaches, transporting 6 million pounds of salmon a month to processors.

"He taught us how to fly airplanes, and he taught us well," said Jerry Ball.

In addition to being a bush pilot in Western Alaska for over 30 years, Albert worked as a trapper and commercial fisherman for 82 years. His fishing operation at Ekuk now includes family members from four generations.



Albert William Ball, Sr. passed away peacefully on April 10, 2014, at the age of 99 in College Place, Washington. Born November 6, 1914, in Aberdeen, Wash., he was a resident of Dillingham, Alaska for many years. After retiring he moved to the state of Washington where he and his wife, Eileen, lived during the winter months. Albert returned to Alaska each summer to commercially fish for salmon only missing one season in the past 82 years.

His son Jerry said, "My dad was the last of the pioneer bush pilots. He flew our Grumman Goose out here last summer. He would have been 100 this November." Ball paused and said softly, "I miss him."

Above: **Albert Ball** standing next to his well-used but trusty Piper Pacer.

"My dad was the last of the pioneer bush pilots. He flew our Grumman Goose out here last summer. He would have been 100 this November."



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Dick & Lavelle Betz

LONGTIME ALASKA GUIDES

By Jane Dale

Dick and Lavelle Betz were Alaska guides for decades. Dick is a registered guide and Lavelle is a Class A-Assistant Guide. They routinely flew fishermen in their two 160hp Super Cubs for a day of fishing followed by dinner at their wilderness lodge on Shulin Lake.

They would land on beaver ponds, fast running rivers, and everything in between if it was a great fishing spot. To the customers, they offered it all. They caught trout, red, king and silver salmon, watched moose, identified flowers and kept a “watchful eye out for bears.”

“Every morning would begin precisely at 5 am as I hit the deck to prepare a breakfast of sourdough pancakes, bacon, eggs, fruit and coffee,” Lavelle recalled. “Then I would pack lunches, check to make sure all of the miscellaneous supplies they may need in the next eight to ten hours were packed, and stage everything on the dock ready to load into one of the Super Cubs. Dick would be on the dock to pre-flight both Super Cubs and fuel, check the oil, clean the windshield and pump out the floats for both planes if needed.”

Lavelle wrote, “I often marvel at how I ended up in Alaska flying the bush side-by-side with my husband, Richard E. Betz better known as ‘Dick’. I was born near Smackover, Ark., when my father worked for the Stanolin Oil Company. My par-

ents split up when I was about six years old. After World War II started my sister Billie Jo and I moved to Iran, Texas, to live with our father, James H. Bailey. In January 1942, my father was involved in a serious automobile accident, nearly taking his life. He spent years in veterans hospitals – the last was in Amarillo, Texas.”

With Lavelle’s father’s blessing Dick and Lavelle were married on April 3, 1945 by the Chaplain Ralph K. Wheeler in Amarillo, Texas.

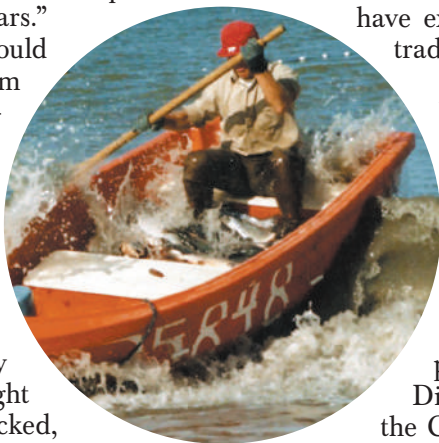
The two began a life neither would have expected, nor would they trade it for anything.

Within weeks of Dick being discharged from the military they purchased a 1942 Ford Woody station wagon, packed their belongings and left for Alaska.

Soon after the couple learned they were expecting their first child, Dick accepted a job with the Civil Aeronautics Administration (CAA) and they moved to Skwentna. The total population in Skwentna at the time was 17, and during their stay two new babies were born in, raising the population to 19.

One of the CAA big wigs enjoyed hunting out of Skwentna, and Dick would guide him. After a successful hunt, he transferred Dick back to the Air Force base at Elmendorf.

Dick’s first airplane was an 85hp Taylorcraft. They flew commercially to Cali-



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE BETZ FAMILY.

LAVELLE BAILEY BETZ

Born

January 24, 1926

Birthplace

Smackover, Arkansas

Came to Alaska

1945

Private Pilot

May 1960

Total Hours

6,000

Still holds a current Medical Amelia Earhart Award

February 1978

Aircraft Flown

Piper Super Cub

Co-Pilot on the Widgeon

Helio Courier

RICHARD E. “DICK” BETZ

Born

September 14, 1919

Birthplace

Hartford, Connecticut

Came to Alaska

1945

Private Pilot

May 1948

Total Hours

12,000

Aircraft Flown

Super Cub

Taylorcraft

C-46

Stinson

Beaver

Chrew Chief

B-25

B-17

Mechanic

Douglas

Lockheed

Pratt & Whitney

They would land on beaver ponds, fast running rivers, and everything in between if it was a great fishing spot. To the customers, they offered it all.

Left: **Dick Betz** rows through a wave on his way to adjust a Cook Inlet set net operation that they purchased.



Lavelle Betz helped with an Alaska 99s Winter Survival Camp in 1979. Lavelle was one of the organizers of the Alaska Chapter of the all woman aviation organization.

for a visit to family in 1956. While in San Francisco Dick spotted a Super Cub and bought it on the spot. It was N8754C. Both Lavelle and their son, Tim, would eventually learn to fly in this aircraft.

Several years later, Dick went to work as an equipment foreman, he was offered a job on the pipeline but declined. He wanted to stay close to home and eventually go into the guiding business.

"I was shocked when Max Shellabarger gave me the qualification letter I needed to get my guides license!" Dick said.

But he did, and Dick enjoyed guiding every moment he was out in the field.

"I made good on that guide license," recalled Dick. When Dick needed an assistant guide, Lavelle was there to take the job and earned her Class A Assistant Guide license, build-

ing a heritage alongside Dick for the remainder of their working careers.

Lavelle earned her single engine land and sea private pilot's license on May 14, 1960. She is a member of the Ninety Nines with over 6,000 hours as pilot in command on skis and floats. Today, at 88 years old, Lavelle still maintains a current medical.

Once Lavelle had a close call in her Super Cub.

"I lost my ski on takeoff from the



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Dick Betz heads out on a snow machine for a supply run from the lodge at Shulin Lake March 2001.

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Talkeetna Village strip. It was January 1978. A girlfriend and I flew our two airplanes into Talkeetna to gas up," Lavelle said. "When it was time to leave, I back taxied all the way to the end of the runway. Just before I got airborne I hit a rut, the ski was pulling me to the left. Firewalled with full right stick and full right rudder, nothing. I knew I was going to buy the farm."

Lavelle looked for an easy place to land but all she saw were trees and frozen stumps in the Talkeetna River ice. Once airborne, a Talkeetna Flight Service attendant got on the radio and told her that the ski was at a right angle to the fuselage.

"I responded that I had it in sight," said Betz and continued flying. "I returned to Shulin Lake with reduced power keeping the airplane airborne at 55 mph."

"Dick was flying with my girlfriend and I called him on the radio and explained I wanted to go to Shulin Lake," said Lavelle, knowing she was likely going to ground loop and feared damaging other people's property if she landed on the Talkeetna runway. "Dick radioed and asked if I was going to be alright and I said, 'Yes, as long as that ski doesn't goose me on landing!'"

Shulin Lake had 8 inches of snow and when Lavelle landed, slow and steady, she did ground loop the aircraft, but had no additional damage to the plane.

Dick also had close calls. One occurred while guiding the base commander and some of his friends hunting Dall sheep by Northway.

"We got five beautiful rams and I was supposed to pack everything out in the base commanders Super Cub on floats, flying to a lake at the border where they parked their vehicles," Dick said. "By the last trip it was dark and I could barely make out the white caps on the river below. I eventually followed a car's headlights into Northway, and as I got closer to the landing spot I saw that everyone had turned on their vehicle lights to help guide me in."

The close calls, rescues and fun stories are endless for Dick. He was, and is, genuinely interested in participating in every adventure that comes his way. He helped his friends, employers and people he'd never met. He is truly one of the best people you could happen upon in Alaska.

Judith, Dick and Lavelle's oldest child, became a communications professor at Delta College and lives with her family in Michigan. Rebecca has now retired from the Teamsters. Their son Tim is now a captain for Alaska Airlines.

Lavelle looked for an easy place to land but all she saw were trees and frozen stumps in the Talkeetna River ice.

Dick and Lavelle were part of the first 15 people who founded the Alaska USA Credit Union.

Although the two stopped guiding over 10 years ago, when Dick was 84, he sure hasn't slowed down. He continues to operate his big boom truck at Lake Hood, helping everyone and anyone in distress.

"Today, we like to go out to Shulin Lake to relax," says Lavelle.



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William “Bill” Diehl

AIRCRAFT MANUFACTURER

By Rob Stapleton



When his aunt and uncle flew over his house and wagged the wings of their Aerosport bi-plane and took six year old Bill Diehl for his first airplane ride, the seed was planted in him that he too would fly an airplane.

Diehl not only accomplished flying in his lifetime but he manufactured and built over 50 aircraft, in Anchorage, Alaska, most of which are still airworthy today. In conjunction with this he opened up another business market when his company became FAA approved for servicing the Arctic Tern.

Bill was born in 1931, William Archie Diehl, in Sacramento, Calif. Bill remembers that one of the most outstanding influences in his life was his father and his family.

Diehl credits his father who was a mechanical engineer, designer and mathema-

tician for helping with the certification of the Arctic Tern. This was especially useful for the FAA certification of the aircraft when it came to G-force stress testing.

Diehl used the influence and advice of his father and flying relatives when he bought the rights to manufacture the tooling and materials from the Interstate Tool Company. Diehl redesigned the two-place L-6 Interstate and put it into production in Alaska.

Diehl's life résumé is a potpourri of challenges and disciplines that lead to the certification and manufacturing of the Arctic Tern and the development of motion simulator cockpits of warbirds for video games with flight simulation for combat. This warbird cockpit simulation was successful until the 9/11 tragedy in 2001. But without a doubt Diehl still leads a busy and fruitful life in Alaska.

Diehl not only accomplished flying in his lifetime but he manufactured and built over 50 aircraft in Anchorage.



Born

March 9, 1931

Birthplace

Sacramento California

Soloed

19 years old

Married

Oct 13, 1956 to Janette Howe

Children

Eric, Mark, Glen, Cherlyn

Came to Alaska

1946

Aircraft flown

J-3 Piper Cub
L-6 Interstate Cadet
Privateer Aircraft
Arctic Tern

Favorite Aircraft

Arctic Tern

Number of aircraft owned

50 Arctic Tern aircraft

Above: **Bill** with one of the first model airplanes built during his childhood. Photo courtesy of Bill Diehl.

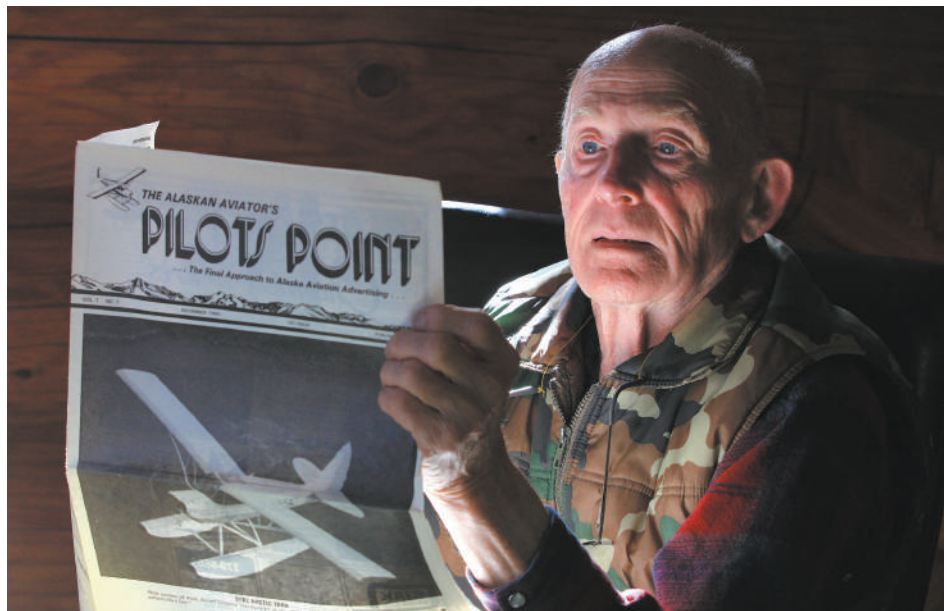
Left: **Privateer** with the rear cargo door open that exposed a large space for the storage or cargo on the four door version of the Arctic Aircraft Company Privateer. Photo courtesy of Bill Diehl.

After high school Diehl worked as a draftsman for the U.S. Navy on Kodiak, he served two years in the U.S. Army, went to the University of Washington for a year of college and worked for Boeing Aircraft at Boeing Field as a method analyst. It was there that Diehl was introduced to Harry Cramer who was training pilots in instrument proficiency. He then went to work for Cramer helping develop and train instrument flying in Link Trainers for the Cramer Instrument Flight School.

After working for Cramer in Seattle, Diehl returned to Alaska to work for Cramer as manager of the Anchorage training office. In the 1960s he bought Cramer's Anchorage business. He continued on contract with the airlines that were doing instrument training for their pilots. After this Diehl contracted again, this time with the FAA. He developed the new Saberliner-Collins FD 108 flight director training system. It was the only simulator at the time available for this type of training, so Diehl trained the majority of FAA pilots in the U.S. on this simulator. Meanwhile Diehl rebuilt the Link System to a more up-to-date generic Twin Engine Jet System, which was very timely because the airlines in Alaska were all going to jets.

Shortly after the success and the profitable venture with the FD-108 system, Diehl decided to proceed with aircraft manufacturing in Alaska.

While working on contracts with



Bill Diehl 2014 is still working with Arctic Tern dealers and is well and enjoying life. Photo by Rob Stapleton. Circle photo: **Bill with grandson Adam** next to one of his Arctic Terns. Photo courtesy of Bill Diehl.

the Link simulators, Diehl purchased the rights to the Interstate Aircraft from Barlow and Reuel Call of Call aircraft Company in Afton, Wyoming.

"We formed the Arctic Aircraft Company in 1968, but it took us five years to get into production," said Diehl. "We started working with the Federal Aviation Administration engineers in 1973 and in 1975 we received the production certificate for the Arctic Tern."

Diehl says that the company produced 29 Arctic Terns, another three as modified aircraft and five- four place experimental aircraft versions, called the "Privateer." Additionally, the company re-built Inter-

state Cadets after they were wrecked. The word got out that the Intestate



Bill and Jan Diehl in the fuselage of the Privateer before it was built. Photo courtesy of Bill Diehl.

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Bill shows off one of the original Arctic Tern data plates and one used later when the company was in full production of the aircraft. Photo by Rob Stapleton.

was again in production and owners wanted or needed parts and data—and those too were modified. All-in-all, the result was nearly 50 aircraft produced in Alaska.

The Arctic Aircraft company was a family affair. With Bill's wife, Jan, at the helm of the office, Bill could oversee fabrication and construction of each airplane.

After Jan passed away Bill was ready for a change and sold the company in 2001. The rights to the Arctic Tern were sold to a company in Lebanon, N.H.

Sadly the company was resold after the buyer's death. The Arctic Tern, with its roots as an Interstate Cadet, is once again out of production due to concerns over product liability by the current owner.

"After the sale of the company I re-

membered that a person can be successful at anything in Alaska, and I was ready for something else," Diehl said. "That's when we started developing the RT7 simulator with tilt and pitch. The first one we developed was

"After the sale of the company I remembered that a person can be successful at anything in Alaska, and I was ready for something else."

a Navy Hellcat which eventually was moved to Atlanta, Ga."

The simulators were headed for success with flight schools in the south, until 9/11 halted aviation in the U.S.

"All of these experiences have led to a full life," said Diehl.

"And, I still keep in touch by consulting with those Arctic Tern owners with questions about this and that," he said with a twinkle in his eye.

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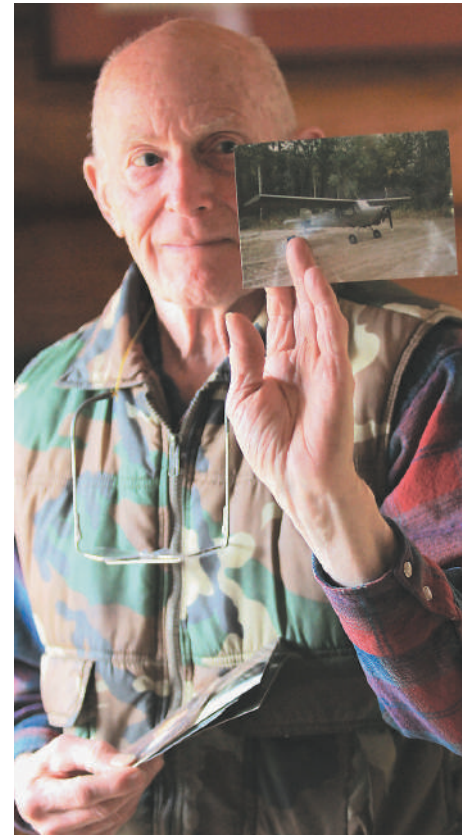
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Bill Diehl proudly shows a photograph of the first Arctic Tern produced by Arctic Aircraft Company. Photo by Rob Stapleton.



The original L-6 Interstate that Diehl redesigned into the Arctic Tern. Photo courtesy of Bill Diehl.



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Dr. Henry

Dr. Houck

Drs. Tilgner and Illig

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Garland Dobson

DEDICATED SERVICEMAN AND PILOT

By Jane Dale and Sabrina Dobson Parsons

Garland Dobson was born Feb. 1, 1948, in Northern Alabama to Thurston and Ilene Dobson. In 1964, Garland and his future wife, Anna Marie, stopped to admire the blue taxiway lights at Chuck Yeager Airport, in Charleston, W.Va., and Garland told her that someday he, too, was going to become a pilot and fly. It wasn't long before Garland did just that.

Garland and Anna Marie were married in 1966, and he learned to fly helicopters in the U.S. Army. In between tours of duty, Dobson earned his multi-engine rating in Anchorage at Merrill Field from Dick and Ramona Ardaiz at AeroTech. In the spring of 1968, Dobson's wings were pinned and he dashed off at 9 am to a few appointments.

The first stop was to the Ozark Alabama Airport where he jumped into a Cessna 150 and flew to the FAA Regional Office located at Fulton County Airport in Georgia. There Dobson took his commercial helicopter written test, where it was scored on the spot and he received his temporary helicopter commercial license. Like clockwork, he jumped back in the Cessna 150 and flew to Enterprise, Ala., where he met designee Harold Moore for a pre-scheduled fixed wing commercial pilot check ride. Mr. Moore asked Dobson to fly the standard chandelles and lazy eights and then took Dobson's temporary helicopter commercial license and replaced it with a new temporary commercial helicopter and fixed wing license.

Dobson smiles and summarizes the chain of events: "The day before I couldn't

spell pilot, and now I was a pilot in three ways, all in one day with 16 hours and 35 minutes total time in fixed wing airplanes."

While in the U.S. Army, Dobson began his first of two tours in Vietnam flying assault helicopters missions with the 282nd Assault Helicopter Company, "The Black Cats."

In 1969, Maj. Steve Henault and two others had departed Whitehorse near midnight in a U-8 and crashed into Mt. Sanford. Their Beacon went off. Dobson was asked to find the wreckage and determine if there were survivors. He located the wreckage and attempted to land near the 15,000 foot summit in a D model Huey with 1100 shaft horsepower. In the end another pilot ended up trying to fly Dobson and a doctor to the mountain but weather thwarted a landing.

The next flight attempt was by a Pan American pilot Rex Post, mountain guide Ray Genet and a mountain climber where they were dropped off above the wreck. They ended up being stranded for two days on the mountain in a snow cave and the pilot eventually died from altitude sickness.

After two tours in Vietnam, an honorable discharge, Purple Heart, and enrollment into the Alaska Guard, Dobson, Anna Marie, and their children, Sabrina and Denny, headed for Alaska permanently.

Soon there after, Dobson, married for five years, found that he was gone for weeks and months at a time. While he loved his work, after flying away from



Born

February 1, 1948

Birthplace

Northern Alabama

Parents

Thurston and Ilene Dobson

Married

Anna Marie Collins
1966, West Virginia

Came to Alaska

May 1972

Helicopters Flown

Bell 205 (Huey)
Bell 204 Gunship
Scout helicopters: Hughes OH-6 and Bell OH-58
Bell 47G3
Hiller 12E
Fairchild FH-1100 turbine
Fixed Wing Aircraft Flown
Piper Super Cub PA-18, PA-11, J-5, PA-12, PA-20
Cessna C-150, C-172, C-180, C-185, C-206, C-207, C-402
Grumman G-21 Goose
De Havilland DHC-2 Beaver
De Havilland DHC-6, Twin Otter
Found Bush Hawk
Mooney
King Fisher Amphib
Dobson Sportsman, Serial #1, PA-14 style
experimental homebuilt

Employment

1968-1972

U.S. Army Military pilot & Commercial Helicopter and Fixed Wing Pilot
1972 Pilot for Alaska Helicopters, (Rex & Ruth Bishop)

1973-1993

Alaska Department of Public Safety, Trooper Pilot

1994-1996

Pilot for Trans Alaska Helicopters

1996-1999

Inspector Pilot for Department of Interior, O.A.S.

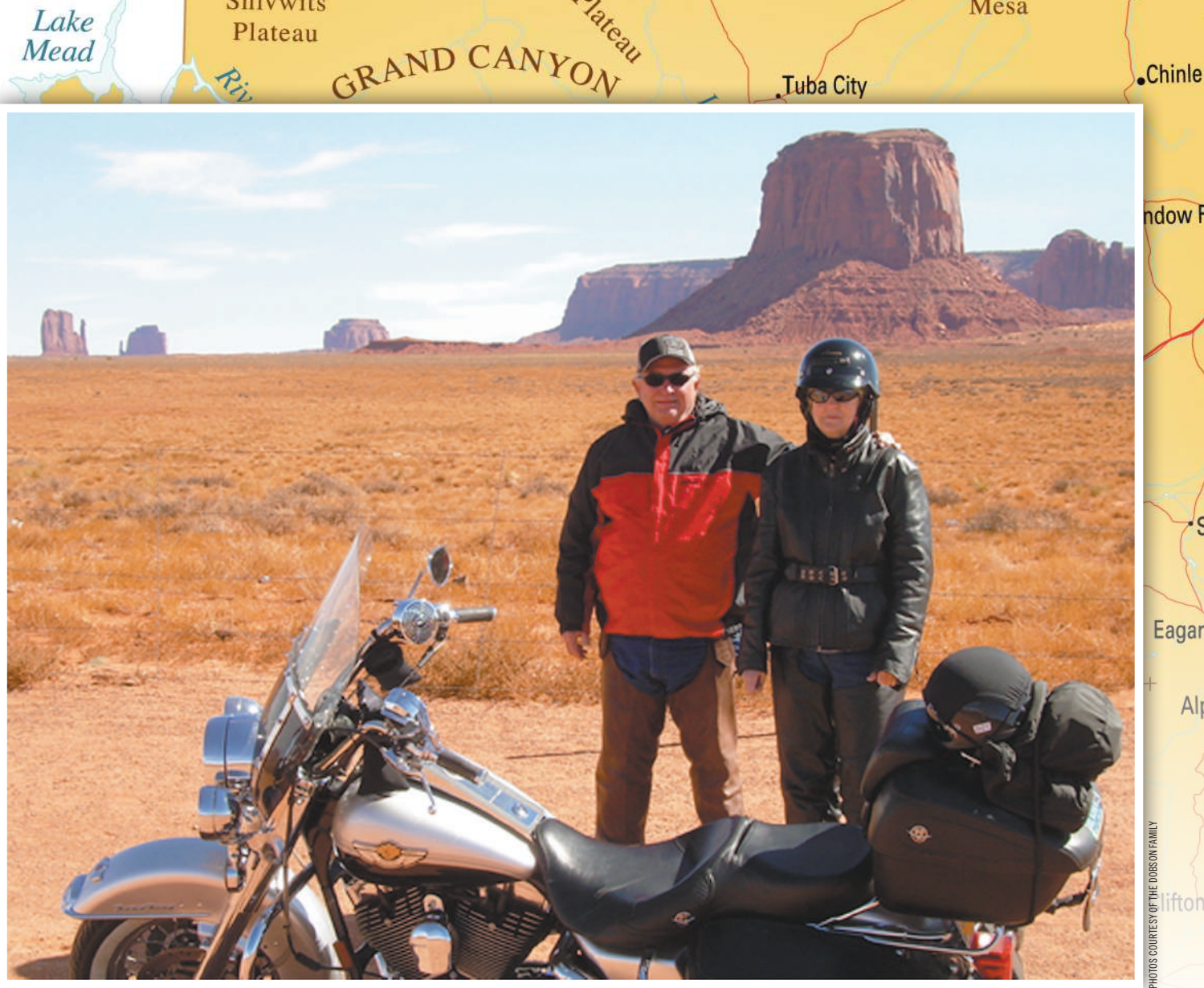
1999-2013

Pilot for US Fish & Wildlife Service

1972-1999

Alaska Army Guard Aviator

Dobson is still living his dream of flight that began all those years ago, when he was just a boy who thought he could fly.



Garland and wife, Anna Marie, Monument Valley, in Arizona with the Harley Davidson motorcycles they use to ride all over the Lower 48.

home for most of the season, Dobson negotiated a break to spend time with his wife and children. Unfortunately, after being home for only two days, Alaska Helicopters requested Dobson in Juneau to help with the Snettisham Powerline Project. Dobson went on to Juneau, and some days later again asked for time off. His request just couldn't be accommodated, so he gave notice.

Six weeks later, the Alaska State Troopers called Dobson and he entered the State Trooper Academy in Sitka, Alaska—once again requiring a lengthy absence from the family. The Alaska Department of Fish and Game Wildlife Protection Officers merged with the State Troopers and created

the Wildlife Enforcement Division called the Fish and Wildlife Protection. Having been hired on as a “blue shirt,” Dobson waited to transfer to the “brown shirts” until after graduating from the academy.

In the course of his career with the State of Alaska, Dobson would be stationed in McGrath (1973), Talkeetna (1975 and 1978), Palmer (1976), Willow (1978) and then moved to Coldfoot in 1989, retiring from the State Troopers in the spring of 1993.

The State's first helicopter, a Bell

47G3, flown by Dobson, was leased from Wilbur's Air Service at Merrill Field. The Troopers' helicopter was dubbed “Helo-1.”



Being the first Helo-1 pilot for the State of Alaska offered some benefits, such as operating out of your home, but there were downfalls, as the State expected the Helo-1 pilot to be on call 24/7. After listening to a radio talk show on wolves in Alaska, Dobson

knew his heart was really in Wildlife Protection. Bob Larsen was hired and became the State's next Helo-1 pilot,



Helo Black Cat A close-up of the Texas memorial to the Black Cats of the Vietnam War.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE DOBSON FAMILY

and Dobson returned to the “brown shirts” and went on to fly everything in the inventory of the Alaska Department of Public Safety.

After Dobson retired from the State of Alaska he wanted to continue working. Dobson met the current Helo One pilot Mel Nading when they were in the Army Guard. Mel Nading hired Dobson to fly for Transalaska. It was an old and familiar routine; deployed for 58 days straight to support an archeological site, called the Mesa Site on the North Slope.

The work was interesting but “the bugs were horrendous,” according to Dobson. After returning from the North Slope for two days he was off to the Innoko Wildlife Refuge for another 22 days straight. Tired of being away from home so long, Dobson left employment with TransAlaska He-

licopters. He then accepted employment as a Pilot Inspector, Department of Interior, and Office of Aircraft Services. In 1999, Dobson changed his employment to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, as a Mentor/Instructor Pilot, until October 2013.

The State’s first helicopter, a Bell 47G3, flown by Dobson, was leased from Wilbur’s Air Service at Merrill Field.

Dobson and AnnaMarie are now enjoying spending more time together traveling, riding their Harley Davidson Motorcycles all over the country, and visiting their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.

Their adventures continue, and Dobson is still living his dream of flight that began all those years ago, when he was just a boy who thought he could fly.



Helo Black Cat Memorial Dobson stands under a Black Cat at the National Vietnam Memorial Museum in Mineral Wells, TX. “I am proud that a Black Cat Helicopter represents all the Vietnam helicopter units.”

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Joyce Galleher

A LIFE OF ADVENTURE IN RURAL ALASKA

By Gail Galleher

Joyce Galleher's life in Alaska was one of adventure, from the time she arrived from Seattle on the DC-3, to flying the routes for the family-owned Munz Northern Airlines. Living her motto of, "Blossom where you are planted," Joyce Galleher made life-long friends and collected rich experiences during her years as a radio operator, weather observer, station agent, station manager, and eventually bush airline vice president and co-owner.

"While the aircraft plays a key role in any aviation family's life, it is the people of the aviation community that really make the life priceless and memorable," said Galleher. "Start an aviation family talking, and the stories go on forever—of the places seen, the harrowing rides, the friends made, the friends and family lost to aviation, and the rich life that a flying life is."

Galleher came to Alaska by herself to join her husband, Dick. She flew the eight-hour flight from Seattle to Anchorage on a prop jet. She rendezvoused in Anchorage at the Parsons Hotel, having to share the room with another woman. The next day she headed out to Northern Consolidated Airlines (NCA) to catch the flight to Bethel, stopping in McGrath on the way.

The NCA aircraft—a DC-3 or C-46—

did not have heat, and Galleher arrived in Bethel wearing her new wool coat and fleece boots for warmth. The temperature was 28 degrees below zero. Clydie Hall had joined husband Dick to meet Galleher at the airplane. As Dick reached out to kiss Joyce at the bottom of the air stairs, a static electricity spark flew between the two.

"Dick, I can see what you have been waiting for!" said Hall.

Although they did not live in Bethel as long as they would later live in Dillingham, Red Devil, Anchorage or Nome, the friends they made in Bethel have lasted for a lifetime. They spent much time at Sophie and Max Lieb's Bethel store, Tundra Shack. Joyce would help Sophie when the DC-3 was coming in with the mining crew.



Galleher remembers that Art "Digger" Almgren, an NCA mechanic, usually cleaned the place out of saltines every time he would come over. Tillie and Ray Christensen ("Chris") were dear friends and Dorothy and Jimmy Hoffman entertained the newlyweds. Jimmy Hoffman's son Mike would later fly for Dick and Joyce at Munz Northern. Everyone in town was friendly and familiar.

When the Gallehers first arrived in Nome and started Northern Aviation, Galleher served as the secretary and



PHOTOS COURTESY OF GALLEHER

Born

Joyce Elaine Peterson
August 11, 1929

Birthplace

Gascoyne, North Dakota

Married

November 18, 1951 to
Richard Galleher

Came to Alaska

March 1952 to their
honeymoon home in Bethel

Aviation Companies

Co-owned with Richard "Dick"
Galleher, Munz Northern Airlines
Northern Aviation (Nome)

Aircraft owned with Dick

Aero Commander, Grand Commander, Stinson Gullwing, Cessna 206, Cessna 185, Staggerwing Beech, Britten Norman Islanders Dornier, PA-12, plus helicopters

Aviation Employment

Nome

Alaska Airlines Cargo

Red Devil

Weather observer & Radio operator

Anchorage

Northern Consolidated
Accounting and Switchboards

Dillingham

Northern Consolidated
Station Manager & Certified
Weather Observer

Airplane Remembrances

Staggerwing Beech (N5115H)
Had a lot of fun in the Staggerwing Beech – it went like a bat out of hell and was a hand full.
Britten Norman Islanders
Worked well for us, carried a good load; smooth flying., PA-12
Soloed in our PA-12 in Nome., N14AM, The Aero Commander that we moved to Nome with. We started Northern Aviation and Dick flew a Granite Mountain contract. Grand Commander, What a lovely plane! Cessna T-50 "Bamboo Bomber"
Stinson SR-9

"While the aircraft plays a key role in any aviation family's life, it is the people of the aviation community that really make the life priceless and memorable."

Above: Dick with Brian, and Joyce with Gail in 1963 in front of Aero Commander N14AM.



Joyce working with Rita Chow on a charitable drive for the Children of the Kuskokwim. Her charitable efforts earned her recognition from the people of Alaska and the U.S. Air Force who named her Mrs. Redfeather.

treasurer. They operated one Aero Commander, 14AM primarily on a contract to Granite Mountain and Tin City communication sites. Galleher also worked for Alaska Airlines in the cargo division, reporting to Del Kampmann.

After arriving in 1958, social activities in Nome included bowling at the old World War II air force base, known for its three warped and tilted lanes. Next to the bowling alley was a big gym that was flooded to make an indoor skating rink.

In 1959, the opening of the new Alaska Airlines terminal created located excitement with dramatic dark brown cork tile on one wall and a butterscotch yellow on the other walls.

While employed by Alaska Air-



Joyce and Dick enjoy a special moment dancing at a Nome event.



Joyce Elaine Peterson, 1951. Photo courtesy of the Galleher family.

lines, Galleher worked cargo, teletype and radio, weight and balance and the aircraft loading manifest. "Normal" loads included sending Isaac Okleasik and his dog team to Fairbanks for the Ice Carnival.

Although based in Nome, life was about the Seward Peninsula and the Bering Sea Islands. Dick regularly flew to Northeast Cape and Galleher was named "Mrs. Redfeather" for the United Way Community Chest campaign.

Galleher remembers when friends from Northern Consolidated came up for the 1959 Midnight Sun Festival in an F-27. With gorgeous weather and aviation families all dressed in midnight sun costumes; an impromptu idea arose to charter the F-27 for a flight around the Diomedes. Shortly after midnight on June 21 (now the 22), 36 people, dressed in 1900 era clothing, took off for the Diomedes. Dick narrated to the passengers as the flight neared the Diomedes. The

Russian coast was plainly visible and the travelers arrived back in Nome at 2:30 am, finishing their festivities with breakfast at 5:00 am.

In 1962, Dick Galleher bought the Civil Aeronautics Board certificate for Munz Airways from Bill Munz, which he started in 1938. This was the start of Munz Northern Airlines and the scheduled airline Dick and Joyce would run for 20 years. Galleher served as vice president and treasurer of Munz Northern Airlines, which grew to serve over 50 villages with 17 aircraft, including Britten Norman Islanders, Dorniers, Grand Commanders, Aero Commanders and helicopters.

Flight loads continued to be interesting. Dick flew scientists, such as Carleton Ray from the New York Aquarium, to St. Lawrence Island to get a walrus for the aquarium. As Dick was on approach to Nome in 14AM, he keyed the mike to get landing clearance from Flight Service just as

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Dick & Joyce Galleher in Nome — Photo by Bob & Ira Spring

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Blaine & Kim, Brett & Conner, Frank & Gail**

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the walrus let out a loud deep bellow. Flight Service asked what they had just heard and Dick responded, "You wouldn't believe me if I told you!"

Flights to Alaska were used to ferry fresh fruit and vegetables, as well as families and dignitaries, including the writer Lawrence Elliott and Lowell Thomas.

The Galleher home had a revolving door of interesting people from around the Seward Peninsula as well as scientists, writers, and diplomats from other countries.

Guests like Herbie Nayokpuk, Weyiouannas, Stanton Patty of the Seattle Times, and travel writers/photographers like the Springs (Bob, Norma and Ira) were delightful guests. Other visitors included Wolfgang Bayer of Hollywood, Jack Smith, Burl Ives and a French TV crew from Paris. Amongst the visiting dignitaries was Governor Christiansen of Greenland.

Running Munz Northern was the core of Joyce and Dick's professional

life. That would not have been possible without the tremendous crew that worked for Munz Northern over the years.

Munz Northern was a family business, with their children—Gail, Brian and Blaine—working in the business. Brian was a pilot who was killed in a plane crash on St. Lawrence Island in 1981. Blaine and his wife, Kim, live in Nome. Their sons Brett and Conner Merboth attend college in Anchorage. Gail and her husband, photographer Frank Flavin, also live in Anchorage.

In 1983, the Galleher's sold to Ryan Air and started the sailboat and classic car phase of their lives.

Joyce often says "I feel like I have had an exciting life and I would do it all over again."

She and Dick made a life as much as a living in western Alaska and built an airline that served from Bethel to Pt. Hope before they retired.

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Royce Morgan

AIRLINE ENTREPRENEUR AND DOCTOR

By Jane Dale

Royce Morgan is a doctor who loved aviation carved his place in Alaska aviation history by creating an airline during the pipeline era while also continuing his medical practice.

“My Uncle Harvey was my inspiration for flying,” said Morgan. “I enjoyed hearing his name frequently mentioned around our household as he was part of the first around the world flight.” Mr. Harvey was the mechanic for the lead aircraft, the Seattle, piloted by Major Frederick – one of the four Douglas World Cruisers built by Donald Douglas for the 1924 flight to circumnavigate the globe.

A Douglas World Cruisers is on display in the Smithsonian Institute and the

engine from the “Seattle” Douglas World Cruiser is on display at the Alaska Aviation Museum located on Lake Hood in Anchorage.

Bob Reeve coordinated the retrieval of the Seattle’s engine using a H-21 helicopter flown by U.S. Air Force pilots and extracted the engine where Major Martin and Royce’s Uncle Harvey crashed near Port Molar, Alaska.

As a young man in Shawnee, Oklahoma, Royce was involved with the Civil Air Patrol and winner of a local essay “Why I Want to fly,” which gave him free flying lessons.

Morgan arrived in Alaska in 1955 when the U.S. Army brought him to Fort Rich-

After serving in the Army and starting his medical practice in Alaska, Morgan expanded his flying skills.



Aircraft Flown

Piper J3 Cub – 65hp
Cessna 140
Aeronca Champ
Cessna 150
Cessna 195
Piper Cub PA18 (90&150hp)
Piper Tri Pacer
Cessna 172
Cessna 180
Beech Bonanza
Piper Cherokee (140,165,225)
Piper Aztec
Cessna 207
Fairchild Porter

Total Time

3,000 hours

Started Polar Airlines

1967

Polar Airlines Aircraft

Was started with – Cessna 180
N6475X
Aztec N5926Y

Then acquired

1-Fairchild Porter (Pilatus Porter)
1-Aero commander
6-Navaho Chieftain
2 more Aero commanders
2-Volpars
13 pilots

Above: **Doctor Morgan** in his work clothes in a hospital visit.

Left: **Royce Morgan and his son Phillip** after a successful moose hunt in the Beluga area. Note the Pilatus Porter aircraft and the tundra tires used for the beach landing.

Right: **Royce Morgan** with a 29 pound King salmon taken out of the Kenai River.
Photos courtesy of the Morgan Collection.

ardson, Anchorage, Alaska. After receiving his honorable discharge Royce stayed in Anchorage and opened a family practice.

By the early 1960s his medical practice was beginning to flourish and after learning about the impending pipeline construction project, Morgan decided he wanted to own and operate an airline. And so he did, his way. Using aircraft suitable for the industry's needs, he created Polar Airlines.

During the growth of Polar Airlines, Royce's mother Lela Morgan served as the airline's secretary-treasurer and sometimes receptionist.

Lela was well known for her handwritten letters she sent back home to former colleagues and friends. It was through these letters that she described the cold extremes of Alaska, expanding the airline and Morgan's successful medical practice. Friends say it was not uncommon for Lower 48 friends and family to receive local newspaper articles from Lela describing her son's successes.

After serving in the Army and starting his medical practice in Alaska, Morgan expanded his flying skills.

"In Alaska, I began flying with Barton Air Service at Merrill Field flying an Aeronca, Cessna 140 and occasionally a Cessna 172, working toward a commercial and instrument rating. My first Cessna 180 dual was given to me by George Brown owner of the Lucky Wishbone restaurant," Morgan said.

"In 1960, I purchased my first airplane, PA-18, 90 horsepower cub with numbers-N9093D. Then in 1960-62, I sold the PA-18 to purchase a 'just like new' Cessna 180, 6475X with about 190 hours Total Time and then purchased N5926Y a new piper Aztec from the factory."

Morgan successfully expanded

Polar Airlines in Alaska and northwest Canada.

"Our busiest and most lucrative route was between Anchorage and Valdez where some days we hauled a few hundred passengers during the construction of the \$9 billion dollar Trans-Alaska Pipeline," he explained.

"Starting Polar Airlines was a way to enlarge my love of aviation and challenge of taking passengers from Anchorage and Valdez the pipeline's terminus in Valdez," said Morgan. "We started

slow and continued to build.

First aircraft were my Cessna 180 and the Piper Aztec. It wasn't long before the Fairchild, Porter and Aero Commander were added. Before it was all over, Polar Airlines consisted of 14 aircraft and 13 pilots," explained



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Dr. Thomas began his career as a Special Forces medic and has been in aviation medicine since 1991 as a Navy, Marine Corps, NASA, and then later USCG flight surgeon. Dr. Thomas is a private pilot, board certified family practice doctor, and has a great interest in aviation medicine, preventative medicine, alternative medicine, hormone replacement therapy and men's health and fitness.

Robert C Thomas, MD
Board Certified in Family Practice
FAA Senior Medical Examiner



Pilot Ray Kerns with a Polar Volpar circa 1975. Photo courtesy of the Morgan collection.

Morgan.

Considered a modest man by his peers, Morgan paid his pilots well and let them do their job, making sure not to micromanage. Alaska Airline Captain and son, Phil Morgan, recalls that the management and professionalism of Polar was ahead of its' time.

"The pilots created instrument plans and avionics plans much like what is required today in regards to Crew Resource Management training," said Phil. "Professionalism was required and chief pilot Crom didn't accept anything less. Pilots weren't pressured but were given the means to make the best choice and they did just that."

Phil attributes his father's education and training in the medical profession to Morgan's keen influence on his management style.

Morgan's aviation business required more of his time. He could not run an airline and be on call.

Polar Airlines maintained a stellar safety record throughout Dr. Morgan's ownership of the airline.

In 1976, Ray Kerns was Polar Airlines Chief Pilot when the airline had its first major crisis. During a routine departure from the Valdez Airport enroute to Anchorage, the Volpar had all seats full (pilot, copilot, 15 passengers) when the tower observed the nose wheel fall off the aircraft.

After extensive investigation, Ray and pilot Dave Anderson determined that the safest way to land the airplane





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would be with the gear up, on its belly. All excess fuel was burned off, the ANC runway 6 was foamed, and just before touch down the engines were shut down and props feathered. The plane landed with minimum damage. No one was injured.

"Passengers reported that was the smoothest landing they ever had," recalls Morgan.

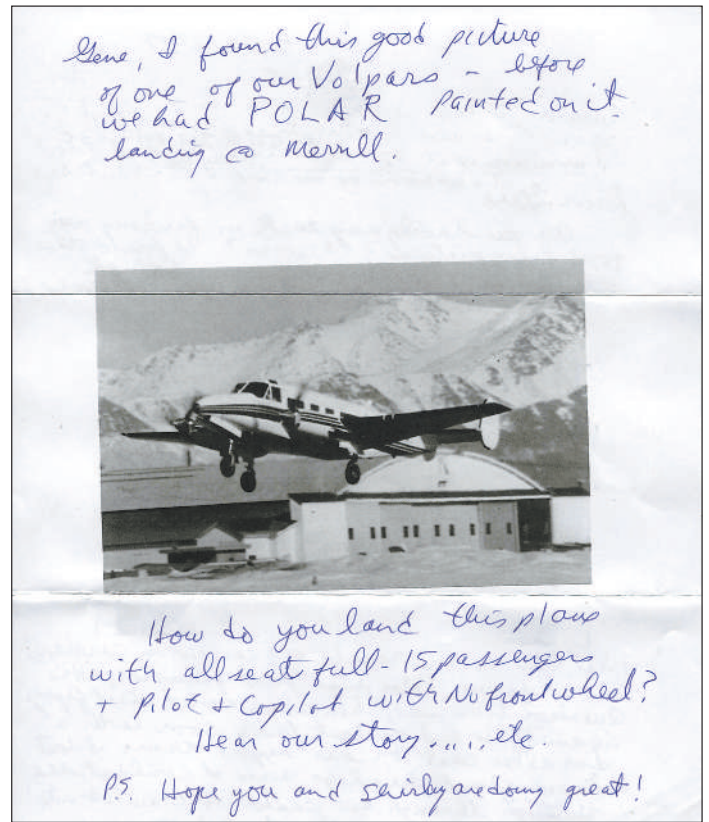
A bus brought the passengers and crew back to the terminal where they gathered and Fernando Campamore offered a prayer of thanks to God for the wonderful outcome of a potentially very serious situation.

"Passengers reported that was the smoothest landing they ever had."

The landing was a success with just a little bit of repair work that 2013 Aviation Legend George Pappas handled easily.

The airline was sold after the pipeline was completed in 1977 to Tim Yule, who operated Polar Airlines until 1980. Morgan continues to practice medicine in Keller, Texas.

Right: **Letter and photograph** from Royce Morgan about a Polar Air Volpar with 15 people on board that safely landed when the nose wheel fell off on take off. No one was injured in the incident. Courtesy of Royce Morgan.



The collage features a map of Alaska in the background. On the left, there is a photograph of a Polar Air Volpar aircraft with the registration N3603R. In the center, there is a portrait of Dr. Royce H. Morgan, an older man with glasses wearing a white lab coat. Below the portrait, the text reads: "Dr. Royce H. Morgan Founder of Polar Airlines, 1969 2014 Alaska Aviation Legend". To the left of the text is a compass rose. At the bottom right, there is a large, stylized letter 'E'.

Dr. Royce H. Morgan
Founder of Polar Airlines, 1969
2014 Alaska Aviation Legend

We're profoundly proud of you and the mark you've left on Alaskan aviation through your vision, leadership and commitment to safety in one of the world's most challenging flying environments. You will always be a legend to us. Phil, Nate and Your Polar Air Family and Friends

Paul Shanahan

TRUE ALASKAN BUSH PILOT

By Joy Journey

Paul Shanahan is one of the last remaining true Alaska bush pilots, and has retired now to Iniakuk Lake in the Brooks Range where he and his late wife, Mabel, built their home in the far north. Shanahan has not only experienced all that Alaska can throw at a pilot, but is an incredible storyteller and host.

The late John Gaedeke of Iniakuk Lake Lodge wrote of Shanahan, "Through the years I have watched him not only overcome incredible obstacles, but revel in them. Paul has had it tougher, and colder, longer than anyone I know, and usually from higher altitudes as well. He has done it with less money, fewer tools and no maps. To me, Paul is 'the good old days' that everybody misses, but with him around, I don't feel like it's missing. I like that."

Shanahan owned a Cessna C-50, Bamboo Bomber that was flown often for multiple companies in Alaska. Shanahan has more than 20,000 flight hours and flew for Southcentral Air in Anchorage,

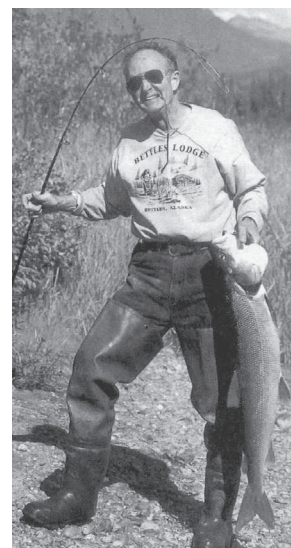
as the only pilot with a multi-engine rating, to which he immediately added a seaplane multi-engine rating. In addition, he flew for Air North, Wright Air out of Fairbanks, Wien Air out of Bettles and all across Alaska.

Paul Shanahan's brother, Tom, was in Alaska when Paul came north in the early 1950s. Before his aviation career, Paul completed his military service and worked three years at Fort Richardson in a civil service job.

Shanahan and his wife homesteaded at Susitna Station, and Shanahan ran a team of big MacKenzie River huskies to tend his trap line, haul firewood and handle other transportation chores around the cabin. Before Shanahan had the plane for trips to Anchorage, he and his wife used a 28-foot outboard wooden boat for transporting loads to the homestead.

ALASKA ADVENTURE

With temperatures well below freezing and the wind whipping, Shanahan



Came to Alaska

1952

Homesteaded

Susitna Station

Soloed, Private License

1957

Commercial License, Twin rating

Airline Transport Pilot

Aircraft flown

Aeronca Champion
J-3 Cub, Cessna 185, 206, 207
Twin Engine Piston Aircraft Flown
Cessna C-50 Bamboo Bomber
Cessna-45 Expediter
Beechcraft 18, Piper Navajo
DeHavilland DHC2 Beaver
Helio Courier
Britten Norman Islander
Turbine Pilatus Porter



Above: **A favorite of Paul** is the 1933 Stinson that was powered by a Lycoming 220 horsepower round engine. From the book *Wings Over Wilderness*.

Left: **The Cessna T50** was a favorite of Paul Shanahan's due to its "civilized" flight characteristics and its ability to haul heavy loads. From the book *Wings Over Wilderness*.



Paul with sons Ian left and Coby right with the moose rack that Coby took in 2002. From the book *Wings Over Wilderness*.

and his wife headed into Anchorage late one fall to resupply for the winter. The going was slow once they reached the open waters of Cook Inlet and the

waves were getting bigger and bigger. Fighting the tide and the wind, they had no option but to turn downwind towards Fire Island to keep the boat

from capsizing. They tried to round the island into the sheltered leeward side, to sit out the storm in the boat cabin.

“Through the years I have watched him not only overcome incredible obstacles, but revel in them. Paul has had it tougher, and colder, longer than anyone I know, and usually from higher altitudes as well.”

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Instead the boat motor died, the boat drifted broadside to the waves and swamped close to shore, sending Shanahan, his wife, and their dog into the water. They made shore and looked for shelter immediately, finding a shack with a fire already prepared in the wood stove and ready to be lit. Once Shanahan warmed himself, he headed up a dirt road to locate help, coming upon an agitated moose bent on stomping him. Shanahan had to dodge the angry moose multiple times until the bull wandered away.

Shanahan found a military phone on a tree by the road and he cranked the handle, reaching the Elmendorf Air Force Base bomb squadron. An armed guard arrived soon to whisk Shanahan and his wife to a military facility where they were separated. Because the U.S. was actively involved in the Cold War at the time, security was high and the Shanahan's involuntarily breached security and the military was none too friendly. Finally, a high-ranking officer arrived and worked to get them off the island as soon as possible, arranging for a helicopter to transport them. The dog had been left in the cabin, the Shanahan's refused to depart the island without their dog, and a standoff ensued. Eventually, in order to have the island return to a secure status the dog was included.

AVIATION ADVENTURE

Shanahan learned to fly at Merrill Field in Anchorage in a Piper J-3 Cub that he bought in 1957 for \$1,600. Paul was a natural pilot and learned easily and quickly, although his instructor is known to have remarked that during his lessons he was getting "too big for his britches." To this day Paul says he thinks of him often as he remembers some tidbit of sound advice that is still applicable and helpful. After receiving his private pilot's license, Paul continued on to receive his commercial license and his ATP.

Paul continued flight lessons on his own once formal instruction was finished.

Soon after receiving his license, with about 50 flight hours under his belt, Paul flew the Cub up a nearby gla-

cier. Paul was hoping to shorten a trip across the Alaska Range by traveling up one glacier and down another on the other side, cutting off several miles. On paper the route looked doable, and while visibility wasn't good, it seemed reasonable. Paul began his journey and was confident things were going well right up until he saw a large dark rock pass by his left wing. He immediately aborted the trip and returned to the safety of the ground. Paul still remembers the startling event.

In the first years of their time at Susitna, he would fly into Anchorage and leave his plane at Merrill Field while working as a longshoreman at the port. At the end of one long day he discovered that his Cub had been "borrowed" and he eventually found out it had also been wrecked.

Shanahan worked to earn enough money for another aircraft and in less than a year had enough saved to purchase another J-3 Cub. This Cub made it through the summer flying season

and into the winter, and then threw a connecting rod. Shanahan was returning home with the plane on skis from a flight to Puntilla Lake near Rainy Pass on an extremely cold day, and he surmises that it was so cold the oil congealed in the engine. Fortunately, a fellow aviator flew over minutes later, landed and took Shanahan to Anchorage.

He purchased a new Continental engine with 15 more horsepower and had a friend take him and the new engine to his stricken Cub. Repairs were soon completed and Shanahan was very pleased with the additional horsepower. The official concept of STCs and FAA approvals was irrelevant at the time, but now the modification is credited to Shanahan. He chuckles as he recalls, "What's four pounds difference when you don't know what you're doing?"

Once Shanahan borrowed an Aeronca Champ from Merrill Field and prepared for takeoff. The plane



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balked and fought him down the runway and he couldn't get up enough speed to get airborne. After shutting down the engine, the air traffic controller came over his radio telling him he was towing something. Shanahan looked out to see the cast iron Jeep engine head was attached to the tail wheel and used to tie the aircraft down. It made for a memorable non-takeoff.

Shanahan flew pipeline patrol, at one time or another covering its entire length from Valdez to Prudhoe Bay.

He and Mabel managed and ran the Wien Airlines operation at Bettles and the grocery store Wien started there.

"If there was one thing that store accomplished, it was that people on the river started using paper diapers," Shanahan recalled. In 1971, "We started getting paper diapers in the by the airplane load, out of Fairbanks."

If Mabel and Paul were both going to be gone from the store for any length of time, they left the door un-

locked and a clip board for customers to record their purchases or orders. They don't remember anyone ever not paying.

Wien Airlines conscientiously provided goods to the villages across Alaska, and Shanahan remembers taking special orders from villagers on his routes, often writing them on the palm of his hand. These included the specific size of knitting needles desired, or the exact color of thread to finish a sewing project.

"I could see how important it was to them," said Shanahan.

John Gaedeke's wife, Pat, tells of another aspect of Shanahan.

"He has no consequence of personal inconvenience, monetary reimbursement or what's in it for him," said Pat Gaedeke. "In other words, Paul is, 'Just like the old maid—available!' One

summer night in August 1991 my husband had not returned from a flight. It was almost 11 pm when my daughter Rachel and I agreed she should jump in the riverboat for the 20 minute ride down to Paul's and ask him to look for her dad in the morning. He said, 'No, I'll take off right now,' and he did. He flew all that night, the next day, and the day after. We had just about run out of options when Paul found the wrecked

"Paul has always done whatever it takes for our family and anyone else who needed help."

aircraft upside down, floating in a lake high in the Brooks Range north of Iniakuk. My husband and his passenger had perished, but another couple was rescued, thanks to Paul and his determination. Paul has always done whatever it takes for our family and anyone else who needed help."



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Ron Sheardown

POLAR ADVENTURER AND RESCUE LEGEND

By Jane Dale

When you grow up across the street from a local airport, you see a lot of aircraft take off and land. You may become fascinated by aviation. You may even long to become a pilot or mechanic.

If your name is Ron Sheardown, and that airport later becomes the Toronto/Lester B. Pearson International Airport, that fascination will result in life-saving rescues, polar exploration, geological discovery, the achievement of many “firsts” in aviation, an award from the Canadian Consul General, and an award from the President of the United States.

Sheardown watched those aircraft at the local airport and relished stories from the local pilots. In 1953, when he was 16 years old, Sheardown worked to earn his private pilot’s license at that airport and today he has amassed over 19,000 hours of flight time as pilot in command, including more than 10,000 hours in countries located in the polar region of the Far North. He has flown in all 50 states and all provinces and territories of Canada, and Greenland, Iceland, Europe, Mexico, Peru, Chile, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Spain, Portugal, Sweden, Norway, Spitsbergen, Denmark, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Midway, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Saipan, Japan, Korea and Russia.

In July 1967, Sheardown flew into Alaska and landed at Point Barrow, followed by Prudhoe Bay. After flying for so long around the Canadian Arctic and Greenland, Sheardown



Ron Sheardown with the AN-2 at Easter Lake, Banks Island in the Canadian Arctic. On a trip with Donny Olson of Nome, retracing one of Eielson’s flights. April 19, 1998. Photo courtesy of Ron Sheardown.

says, “I thought I had arrived in the tropics!” By 1970, Ron moved full-time to Alaska and became the senior vice president and project manager for the Lost River Mining Corporation until 1974, when he formed Greatland Exploration Ltd.

THE ROBERT GAUCHIE RESCUE

Night temperatures were reaching 40 below zero at Cambridge Bay, just north of the Arctic Circle, when bush

pilot Robert Gauchie pre-heated his aircraft and departed on Feb. 2, 1967. His original plan was to make Yellowknife by mid-afternoon and continue home the following day to Fort Smith. “Shortly after noon Gauchie encountered a driving snowstorm. About to set an instrument course, he found that neither his turn and bank indicator, nor artificial horizon, was working.”

Gauchie radioed “May Day” and the Royal Canadian Air Force suggested he land, seek refuge and activate SARAH (the search and rescue transmitter). He complied and after landing attempted to activate SARAH, but nothing happened. Days went by as Gauchie endured temperatures often at more than 40 below. There were occasions when an aircraft passed overhead and Gauchie fired flares, but they were never seen.

On April 1, 58 long days later, Gauchie was crawling back into his sleeping bag at 6 p.m. when he heard the sound of an aircraft. Gauchie kept a log during his time on the ground and had written to his wife that he didn’t have more than a couple days of life left. At the sound of this plane overhead he jumped out of his downed aircraft and fired a flare as the turbine Beaver flew overhead, but it continued on as before. Facing sure death, Gauchie suddenly realized that the red Beaver began to increase in size. It was turning back!

Sheardown and mechanic Glen Stevens were flying to a mining camp after being delayed by a mechanical

In 1953, when he was 16 years old, Sheardown worked to earn his private pilot’s license at that airport and today he has amassed over 19,000 hours of flight time as pilot in command.



Ron Sheardown, Lee Barker, and Waldemar Miszkurka at Alert NWT (Nunavut), 450 miles from the north geographic pole. Top right: **Ron Sheardown** at the Old, Bold Pilots gala sponsored by the Alaska Aviation Museum in May 2014. Sheardown was honored as an Old Bold pilot during the event and was a guest speaker. Photo by Rob Stapleton. Circle photo: **Ron Sheardown and Trevor Hendersen** with the Pembroke Capital banner at the Geographic North Pole. April 17, 1998. Photo courtesy of Ron Sheardown.

issue with their own aircraft. It was approaching sunset when they passed Samandre Lake and Stevens happened to catch a reflection of the sinking sun off something that seemed unusual. After a brief discussion, Sheardown entered into a steep turn back toward the lake and descended to 2,000 feet where both pilots saw a dark figure moving out from an aircraft barely visible in the snow. Two flares lighted the lowering sky beside them.

After landing near Gauchie's downed plane, Sheardown recalls, "He stood there with a blue suitcase, like a man waiting for a bus." Gauchie limped toward the turboprop. He was "a haggard creature with shaggy hair, both feet wrapped in dirty canvas, and a bearded, emaciated face lighted by a shining grin," Sheardown recalls

"Hello," Gauchie said. "Do you have room for a passenger?" He ended up spending two and a half months in the hospital and another six months recuperating at home, but he received a second chance, plus 40 years at life, thanks to

Sheardown and Stevens. Gauchie would call every April 1st to say thank you.

NORTH POLE ADVENTURES

Sheardown has flown eight times to the North-Geographic Pole seeking information about historic routes, flightseeing over the ice pack or just flying abroad to Europe and Russia.



From 1997-2000 Ron flew an AN-2 annually and then again in April 2001 in an AN-2 owned by Marvin Grendahl, to search at Camden Bay on the North Slope for the aircraft of Russian Pilot Sigizmund Levanevsky lost in 1937. In 2013, a group of Russian investigators, including the grandson of the 1937 N209 radio operator, joined Sheardown in a search of the area. Others have also searched and Sheardown continues to raise funds necessary to support a true geophysical search method incorporating both magnetic and side scan sonar to locate the aircraft.

In 2000, Ron was returning from a "routine" sightseeing adventure over the North Pole ice pack in his Polish built



Born

August 8, 1936

Birthplace

Bolton, Ontario

Came to Alaska

1967

Private Pilot

1953

Commercial

1954 (Canada) 1971 (US)

Instrument & Multi Engine

1956

US Airline Transport

1989

Pilot in Command Time

19,000+

Fixed Wing Aircraft Flown

DC-3, DC-4 C-46, PBX 5A, 6A AND SUPER PBX, Lancaster, L18 AC-500, 681, 690, DHC-2, 3, 6 Harvard, Cornell. Lockheed Jet Star 1329, Westwind 1124, Lear 35 PT-17 Stearman, N3N, DH Tiger Moth, Antonov AN-2, AN-24, AN-26, AN-28, YAK -40, Most single and multi-engine Cessna's and multi-engine Pipers, Beechcraft Starship & 30 other types, Britten Norman Island and, Turbine Islander

Helicopters Flown

Bell 47 series, Bell 204, 205, 212, 206, 206L, Brantley B-2, Enstrom 28A, 28C, 28F, 280C, Hughes 300 and 500 series, Hiller 12E, FH-1100, Robinson R22, R44, Eurocopter A Star, Russian MI-8 and MI-17

Employment

1954-56

L & L Dredging

1956-57

World Wide Airways Montreal DEW line

1958

Murray Mining Corporation (17 Years)

1967

Lost River Mining Corporation (Alaska) (4 years)

1974

Greatland Exploration, Ltd. (Alaska - Self Employed)



Sheardown receives the "Order of the Smashed Brick" award from Canadian Consul General Roger Simmons, P.C. Photo courtesy of Ron Sheardown.

AN-2 biplane when he encountered unexpected thin ice conditions while landing and the airplane went through the ice up to its wings.

A lifetime of accomplishments by Sheardown includes being honored by the Canadian and U.S. governments for his aviation and mining activities. Sheardown received the "Order of the Smashed Brick" from the Canadian Consul General in 2002 and was on the ADS-B Capstone Team that won the Robert J. Collier Trophy in 2007. He and Murray Watts are credited with finding the second richest deposit of iron ore in the world. Located on Baffin Island, the ore mine at Nuluujak Mountain is under development and being mined with trucks hauling the ore to a nearby port.

Sheardown owns an R-44 and a Westwind 1124 and keeps his licenses current. He is a member of The Explorers Club, a life member of the Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada, recipient of the U.S. Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association - 50 year Member Certificate, Alaska Airmen Life Member, recipient of the Canadian Aircraft Owner and Pilot Association - 60 year member Certificate, and has served as Honorary Consul to Canada for 15 years and is Consul Emeritus. Besides aviation and world travel, his other interests include exploring, skiing, photography, camping, hunting and fishing.

Sheardown remains fascinated with discovery and aviation, and, thankfully, is always willing to use his aviation skills to support those in need of assistance.



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Ron Sheardown (left), Bob Gauchie, and Glen Stevens (right) as Gauchie exited a rescue aircraft on April 1, 1967 after going missing when his plane went down in the Canadian Arctic. Gauchie was stranded for 58 days in sub-zero weather. Photo courtesy of Patricia Gauchie.



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Warren Thompson

RESCUE MISSION LEGEND AND TEACHER

By Jane Dale

Aviation has been Warren Thompson's primary interest since he was a teenager. He started working part-time at the local airport in Libby, Mont. after school and obtained his private pilot's license in 1947, when he was 17 years-old. Thompson began his private flying in 1954, and worked to receive all the ratings available in small aircraft (private, commercial, ATP).

Thompson is notorious for rescue missions in the Northwest regions of Alaska. He earned not only mention in the U.S. Congressional Record, but he twice won the Civil Air Patrol's Medal of Valor for Heroic Action and is a two-time recipient of the Air Command Rescue Trophy. Thompson located or helped find dozens of people lost in the Alaskan Bush.

He was enlisted in the U.S. Navy and served around aircraft as an air crewman

operating radios on board B-24 high-altitude photo reconnaissance aircraft and maintaining the Navy's version of the Twin Beech.

"The aircraft were basically World War II air frames, but they had turbo chargers and could operate at high altitude," said Thompson. "We were supporting the USGS mapping of the Aleutian Chain and the Brooks Range, so flew over at 24,000 feet with the aircraft bomb bays open and large Fairchild cameras shooting images of the ground."

Describing the condition during post WWII Thompson recalled, "The camera negatives were 9 by 18-inches, and the images were supposed to overlap by 30 percent or we'd have to re-fly the pattern. As the radio operator, I had a nice warm, cozy office.

"The photographers were in heated

"I taught a lot of young Alaska Native men to fly, and it was an honor and a great source of enjoyment for me."



Born

December 30, 1929

Birthplace

Libby, Montana

Came to Alaska

1949

Began Flight Lessons

Oct 3, 1944

Solo

May 24, 1946

Commercial

June 12, 1956

Seaplane

June 17, 1958

Instrument

(FAI) Feb 27, 1960

ATP & Multi Engine

1965

Instructor CFII

Total Flight Hours

38,353

Aircraft Flown

Taylorcraft, Aeronca Champ
Piper J-3 Cub, PA-18-150
Dornier, Stinson
Twin Beech
Piper PA-11, DHC-2 Beaver
Cessna 180, 185, 206, 207
Cessna 402
Navajo, Single Engine Otter

Aviation Service

U. S. Navy
Boeing

FAA Flight Service Station

Civil Air Patrol
Baker Aviation
Ryan Air

Above: **Warren** in his Navy sailor uniform shortly after he enlisted in the U.S. Navy in 1947.

Left: **Warren Thompson** opens the cockpit door of a Ryan Air twin after delivering a load of people to the villages in Northwestern Alaska. Thompson flew for Ryan after he retired from the FAA... Photos courtesy of the Thompson family.



Warren Thompson stands next to his Piper PA-18 Super Cub he used for instruction and many rescue missions in the Kotzebue Sound and Kobuk region. Below: **Warren and May** enjoyed getting out of Kotzebue to gather subsistence and harvest the land near their remote cabin in northwest Alaska. Photos courtesy of the Thompson family.

suits, on oxygen like the rest of us and roped to the aircraft so they wouldn't fall out. We let out our antenna once we were in flight with a five-pound lead weight so that it trailed out behind the aircraft. We'd have to hand-crank it back in before we landed. The navy had more modern aircraft and more modern communications equipment but our mission was stuck at the end of a previous time because of the mission requirements."

Besides bases of work outside of Alaska, Thompson found himself in aircraft based from Kodiak and Umiat Alaska. In 1951, a Navy aircraft lost a nose wheel in Kotzebue and Thompson was on the ground with it for several days until it could be repaired and returned to service in Umiat.

After his military service he worked briefly at Boeing in Seattle, but the big city did not appeal to him. He took a job with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and after training asked to be sent to Alaska.

Thompson began working for the FAA in July 1952, at Umiat, and after a few months was stationed at Kotzebue, where he excelled at the Flight Service Station.

Warren is particularly pleased at how many of Alaska's aviators became friends and acquaintances because of his time on the radio with them. He stresses that he always approached his work with safety of utmost importance. He remembers multiple times talking to a pilot who found himself in a difficult situation. Thompson said it was important to talk soothingly and reassure the pilot, taking him back to a calm place where he could be rational and they could work through whatever problem confronted the pilot. Thompson

said he is sure that approach saved many a life.

Thompson says aspects of aviation remain the highest points for him—safety and teaching.

"I taught a lot of young Alaska Native men to fly, and it was an honor and a great source of enjoyment for me," he said.

During Thompson's FAA employment, he would serve a shift at the Flight Service Station, then hop in a plane and help out local air taxis where needed.

Lori (Baker) Henry remembers with a smile, "Warren Thompson trained a lot of us. Growing up in a family business, there are people that you look up to for certain things. Thompson had very high safety standards and we all knew them. He didn't





US Navy Beech18 Thompson was a crew member on Beechcraft twins used for aerial photography and reconnaissance missions while he was in the U.S. Navy in the late 1940s. Photo courtesy of the Thompson family.

bend on those things and I was struck by that as a young person. He is still instructing and inspiring us today.”

Thompson is constant reminder of service, quality and standards according to Henry.

“Everywhere you look around Kotzebue, you will see him out biking and walking. He and his wife May were always out,” Henry said. “They were connected to the land hunting, fishing and gathering, and those memories I cherish. And now that she is gone, he is still out there for the whole village to see. We get great inspiration and comfort from seeing him out all year long.”

Thompson served at the Kotzebue Flight Service Station until 1985 when he retired. Then he flew full-time for Ryan Air for twenty years.

Before the CAP was established in Kotzebue, commercial and private pilots looked for hunters and travelers lost in the remote area. Thompson volunteered then, piloting his Piper or whatever else was available.

“I like to fly, and it was a good way to do that and help people, too,” he said.

Thompson excelled at search and rescue work and received numerous commendations and awards over the 60 years he served. He and John Cross started the Kotzebue Civil Air Patrol in the early 1960s and worked closely with what is now the Rescue Coordination Center. In 1979, the president of NANA asked Thompson to help them form a region-wide search and rescue plan that included the NANA Region, State Troopers, CAP, RCC, and the National Guard. It was a widely acclaimed success.

Thompson has flown over 38,000 hours, equally 5.5 years in the air. Thompson lost his flight medical and can no longer fly missions. But, if you talk to anyone in Kotzebue, they will tell you what a daily inspiration he is.

Thompson’s dedication to safety and his flying skills have been noticed by senators, congressmen, governors, Alaska Native leaders, the US Air Force, Civil Air Patrol, and the Alaska State Legislature, not to mention the dozens of individuals that he saved from peril.

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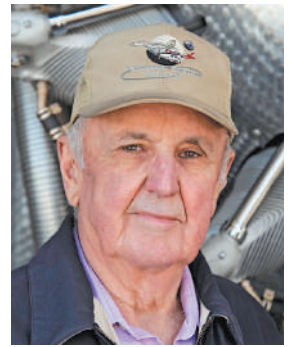


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Noel Merrill Wien

DIVERSIFIED AND EXPERIENCED PILOT

By Joy Journeyay



Noel Merrill Wien has to be one of the most diversified and experienced pilots of his time. With over 30,000 accident free hours of flying, Wien has owned 20 different aircraft and flown 149 different types.

Noel “Merrill” Wien was born in Virginia, Minn., on April 4, 1930. His mother was born in Nome and father, Noel Wien, came to Alaska in 1924 and became one of the first pioneer pilots to bring air travel to Alaska.

EARLY FLYING

Seventy days after he was born, Merrill Wien appeared on the front page of the St. Paul-Minneapolis newspaper with his mother, Ada. The photograph was accompanied by an article stating that baby Merrill lay claim to having more time in

the air than any other U.S. “aviator” his age.

“My interest in flying began at an early age, probably obtained through vibration osmosis from the 1930 Stinson my father recently purchased,” said Wien.

Ada returned to Alaska with young Merrill, traveling by train to Seattle and then on Alaska Steamship to Alaska. Noel flew the Stinson to Fairbanks, taking along his brother Sig. The Wien’s story is woven into the very fiber of Alaska’s development.

Merrill’s story is shared below in his own words:

“By age two, dressed in the appropriate flying gear, I knew I was ready to get on with the business of flying airplanes. However, this did not happen fast enough. My

“By age two, dressed in the appropriate flying gear, I knew I was ready to get on with the business of flying airplanes.”



Born

April 4, 1930

Birthplace

Virginia, Minnesota

Came to Alaska

1930

Private Pilot

1947

Commercial & Seaplane

1949

Instrument Rating

March 1950

Military Experience

Air Force, C-119

Air Force, Grumman SA-16 Albatross

Alaska Air Natl. Guard Fairchild

C-123

Type Ratings & LOAs

B-17

Boeing 737

Boeing 727

CV-LB30 (B-24)

CV-PBY5 (Catalina)

C-46, DC-3, DC-4

Douglas B-26F-27, L-1011

L-1049, N-B-25, B-29, P-38

MI-A6M (Zero)

P-51, T-28, G-TBM

Helicopters

All types of single & multi engine piston aircraft

Aircraft Owned

20

Aircraft Flown

149

Total Hours

30,000 accident free

FAA National Designated Pilot

Examiner Resource

Left: Merrill Wien flies a B-25.

This picture was taken after flying co-pilot with the new buyer of a B-25 that Merrill used to own. The plane is now in a museum at Paine Field near Everett, Washington. Photo courtesy of the Wien collections.



Hamilton Standard Metal Plane "I was privileged to be able to fly this 1929 Hamilton Metal plane last year (2013). This is the type of airplane that my dad (Noel Wien) bought in 1928 and made many historic flights in Alaska, including the first round trip flight between North America and Asia. I was thrilled to be able to fly it. It is now owned by Howard S. Wright in the Seattle area." Photos courtesy of the Merrill Wien collection.

childhood playground was the Weeks Field airport where I spent a lot of time cleaning aircraft bellies. On school days I was constantly distracted by the airplanes on final approach going by the school windows," said Wien. "When I had the chance to fly with my dad, I paid close attention to how he controlled the airplane. I was sure that I had it all figured out, and longed for the chance to prove it. When I finally

"We thought about getting into the helicopter business, as there weren't many in the business and we saw a need."

did get the chance to attempt a landing, the ground came up fast and things did not work out as planned. This experience set my confidence back a couple of days!"

The Wien family moved to Seattle for a period of time and Merrill was able to begin his official training.

"I took my first official flying lessons at the airport on the Smith Dairy farm in Kent, Wash.," said Wien. "And when the flight school moved to Boeing Field, I soloed on my 16th birthday. My flight instructor was a cute 23-year-old ex-WASP (Women Airforce Service Pilots) named Sherry Phelps. The following summer I received my private license

in Fairbanks on my 17th birthday."

"While attending the University of Washington, I worked at the fledging Kenmore Air Harbor founded by the legendary Bob Monroe, continuing my flight training while working as a gas boy. World War II B-24 pilot, Bill Fisk, was my primary instructor when I also acquired a seaplane rating. I then acquired my commercial license back in Fairbanks from Hawley Evens in July 1949," he said.

"I trained for the instrument rating with Harry Cramer in his Link trainer at Boeing Field and Harry talked me into getting a Link instructors rating," Wien said, referring to an early model flight simulator. "I acquired my instrument rating at Renton in March 1950. A few days later I traveled with my dad to Wichita to pick up a new Cessna 170 and fly to Fairbanks."

Merrill went on to receive military flight training.

"I started primary pilot training at Marana, Ariz., in September 1952. Although I had about 1,500 hours of flight time by then, I consider the six months in primary flight training some of the best training I have ever received," said Wien.

Wien flew T-28, B-25, Douglas B-26, and C-119 in the Air Force.

WIEN AIRLINES AND HELICOPTERS

After military flying, Wien returned to Alaska to fly for Wien Airlines flying the DC-3.

However, Wien said, "I also enjoyed flying the smaller bush planes. As the Airline grew I flew C-46, DC-4, Constellation, F-27, Boeing 737 and 727."

A demonstration flight was all it took to hook the Wien brothers, who eventually started one of the largest helicopter businesses in Alaska.

"In 1959, my brother Richard and I were treated to a demonstration flight in a Hiller 12E," Wien said. "We had never ridden in a helicopter before and enjoyed the experience very much. We thought about getting into the helicopter business, as there weren't many in the business and we saw a need."

As luck had it, that summer the Hiller factory brought a new Hiller 12E and the Hiller test pilot, Phil Johnston, was told not to bring it back. Hiller made the brothers an offer they couldn't refuse, including training for a commercial license at their factory.

"I went to California for thirty days of intense training by Hiller test pilots," Wien said. "I did not know what great training I received until we tried to hire qualified pilots, since I did not have enough time to get insurance."

The brothers hired two pilots and eventually Merrill was insured.



Merrill at two years old in his flight suit and ready to fly.

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"But my time in the helicopter was limited due to my airline flying," Wien explained. "When Vietnam started to retire helicopter pilots, we were then able to hire some great pilots—many who were instructors."

"In 1960, my brother Richard and I, along with our friends Stan Halverson and Doug Millard, founded Merric, Inc." Wien said. "We initially operated two B-25 aircraft to do borate bombing for fire-fighting, along with the Hiller 12E we had purchased. In time we sold the B-25's and expanded the helicopter business. In 1969 Richard resigned from Wien Airlines to become President and General Manager of Merric. We added many more helicopters, and in 1973 we merged Merric into Era Helicopters."

Wien also flew into the McCall glacier, Juneau Ice Cap and Mt. McKinley glaciers.

"With glacier flying experience, Lowell Thomas Sr. asked me to support the filming of his High Adventure program on Alaska for television," Wien reflected. Wien also flew C-46 DC-4 and even a Boeing 737 into lakes and on the DEW Line (Distant Early Warning) on the North Slope of Alaska.

In 1987, Wien was hired by an airline to fly Lockheed 1011s as captain until he turned 60 and was forced by regulation to retire from flying wide body aircraft.

In 1993, Wien found himself as one of the chief pilots for round engine aircraft for the Confederate Air Force Southern California Wing, where he flew B-17, C-46, and B-25, B-24 and B-29 aircraft.

Merrill and Barbara Wien's children are also in aviation. Daughter Kimberlee has been a flight attendant for Alaska Airlines for the past 29 years and their two sons, Kurt and Kent, are both American Airlines captains.

Wien's flight and training experience is so varied and valuable that he has been named as a Federal Aviation Administration Designated Pilot Examiner Resource.

Kenneth Gene Zerkel

PILOT AND AVIATION ENTREPRENEUR

By Joyce Zerkel and Joy Journeyay



Kenneth Gene Zerkel was born in his aunt and uncle's farmhouse west of Berne in Wells County, Indiana. Gene is the oldest of six children born to Oliver Kenneth "OK" Zerkel and Sarah Marie Burdge Zerkel.

"When I was about three years old, a barnstormer flying a WACO landed in a field about a block from my Grandparent's home. I don't know how Dad did it, but he purchased a ride for us on the plane," said Zerkel. "When the plane banked I looked over the side of the aircraft and saw Hanna Nutman Creek below. To this day, I remember that as if it was happening right now! From that moment on, all I ever wanted was to fly."

When World War II broke out, Zerkel enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps as a

pre-aviation cadet in December 1942, but because of his age he had to wait until February 1945 to be called to active duty.

"During the months I waited, I took flying lessons at Smith Field in Fort Wayne, Ind., where I soloed a Piper Cub," Zerkel said.

To make a living after soloing, Zerkel worked as a time keeper, line boy at an airport, railroad firefighter, and a hostler for the Pennsylvania Railroad. A short stint with the McComb Air Show in the Midwest had Zerkel wing walking and ferrying aircraft from city to city.

In February of 1945, Zerkel was called to active duty in the Army Air Corps, where he took flight training twice as a cadet, but was sent to teletype mechanics school when the end of WWII ap-

Born

August 16, 1926

Birthplace

Wells County, Indiana

Came to Alaska

1974

Private Pilot

1943

Commercial

1946

Flight Instructor

1946

Float Rating

1947

Total Flight Hours

12,000 +

Aircraft Flown

Piper Cub

Navy N-3N

Aeronca

Ryan PT-22

Cessna 120, B-25

C-45, C-46, DC-3

DC-4

DC-6, DC-7

De Havilland DHC-2

F-84 T-6, T-28, T-33

And many other aircraft types

Aviation Employment &

Aviation Companies Owned

Pierce Flying Service

McComb Air Show

Airgo

US Air Force

Flying Tiger Line

Zantop

Universal Airlines

Fairbanks Air Service

Great Northern Airlines

MarkAir

Great Northern Air Guides

Alaska Aircraft Sales & Maintenance

Above: **Zerkel** in aviator uniform.

Left: **Gene Zerkel and Air Corp friends** in front of a C-47 when he became a B-25 instructor in Texas. Photos from the Zerkel collection





Zerkel and Russ Bannock of the DeHavilland company standing in front of a DeHavilland Beaver on Amphibious floats. Photo from the Zerkel collection.



Zerkel J3 Cub. Photo from the Zerkel collection.

proached.

In 1946, Zerkel finished his commercial and flight instructor ratings at Airgo and was soon hired on at the company as a commercial pilot and flight instructor. The next summer, Airgo put a Cessna 120 on Edo floats and told Zerkel to fly to Lake Wawasee near Syracuse, Ind., and open a seaplane base.

“Later I reenlisted in the U.S. Air Force as an aviation cadet in 1949, and was sent through Primary Pilot Training at Goodfellow Air Force Base

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in San Angelo, Texas. I was in a bad car accident in San Angelo, and almost washed back a class as I had to go to Reese AFB in Lubbock, Texas for B-25 advanced training. I made it and graduated with the highest score in my class as an 'Outstanding Aviation Cadet of the Class of 50E.' I wanted to go to the Military Airlift Command at Hickam Field in Hawaii, but was retained as a B-25 instructor at Reese," Zerkel explained.

In 1953, Zerkel left the Air Force and went to work as a first officer with the Flying Tiger Line in Burbank, Calif. A short time later Flying Tiger Line and Slick Airways started a merger and he was furloughed, once again returning to Indiana.

"My next job was as a first officer at Zantop Air Transport. I flew co-pilot for 30 days then was promoted to captain. I moved quickly to check pilot, chief pilot and finally director of operations," he said.

"I decided about this time that I wanted a change in my life and would like to try something on my own."

At Zantop the planes would fly 500 miles from Churchill to Coral Harbor, and often see polar bears on the frozen ice.

"When they ran from the plane noise, all of a sudden they would leap into the air and land on all fours, punching through the ice into the sea below. How they could sense the thin ice spot while they were at a dead run still fascinates me," Zerkel remembers.

For a little over two years Zerkel worked out of Frobisher Bay on Baffin Island. "I had a very nice DC-3 with heaters. We would put freight on one side of the aircraft together with passengers down the other side. As a result, the superintendent of construction picked me to do all his flying," he said.

"I worked thirteen years with Zantop until it was sold to Universal Consolidated Industries in New York and renamed Universal Airlines. I continued employment with them as vice president of operations and maintenance and was shortly promoted to senior vice president," said Zerkel.

In 1970, Zerkel joined Saturn Airways as a senior vice president of operations and maintenance, and also served the military needs through the Military Airlift Command.

"I decided about this time that I wanted a change in my life and would like to try something on my own. I always loved the far north," Zerkel said.

"A week after making an offer on an interior-based Fairbanks Air Service, George Patterson and I met with Mr. Usibelli and offered to take over management of the Fairbanks Air Service company for \$3,000 each in compensation. Mr. Usibelli said, 'Absolutely not,' but would let us take over management for a period of 90 days," said Zerkel.

Gene was in Fairbanks, while his wife, Joyce, stayed in California to sell their home and pack up the boys to move north. "I told her we would probably be able to move back

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Zerkel (right) and Jack Behrens with the Cessna 120 seaplane in 1947. Photo from the Zerkel collection.

to the Lower 48 in five or six years. That was in 1974! We obviously both grew to love Alaska!” he said.

“At the end of 90 days, by June 1974, we had made \$300,000 so Usibelli decided he wanted us to stay as part owners,” said Zerkel. “The stock was divided between me, Usibelli, George Patterson and Hawley Evans who had partnered with Usibelli.

“Eventually, George and I bought all the stock and were sole owners. We moved the operation from Fairbanks to Anchorage in 1978 and changed the name to Great Northern Airlines,” Zerkel said.

Neil Bergt, chairman and owner of Alaska International Air approached Zerkel to see if they would like to sell Great Northern.

“This was the right time, and we sold in 1980,” Zerkel said. “George and I purchased a hangar on Lake Hood that was owned by Pete Knudsen and spent the next two years pursuing entrepreneurial endeavors in Anchorage. One of these was founding Alaska Aircraft Sales at Lake Hood, the busiest seaplane base in the world.”

Zerkel then went to work for Neal Bergt as vice president of operations, and MarkAir was chosen as the company name.

“We flew the C-130 Hercules and 737s throughout Alaska, operating from a dispatch center in Anchorage, eventually



Zerkel with his mother- Kirk, Gene, Kira, Kyle, Gene’s mom Sarah Marie Zerkel, and Keenan climbing out of the Widgeon hatch. Photo from the Zerkel collection.

becoming the largest in-state carrier in Alaska,” he said.

MarkAir continued to grow and became a profitable airline, and disagreements arose between the new Neal Bergt. The disagreement caused Bergt to enter the Seattle market, then Southeast Alaska. The resulting competition between Alaska Airlines and MarkAir caused both carriers to drop far below profitability. As a result MarkAir found it necessary to file for bankruptcy under a Chapter 11 proceeding.

“We also obtained an airline operating certificate in 1991 and restarted Great Northern Airlines, providing passenger and freight service between Anchorage and Seldovia,” Zerkel said. “I continued to expand the air charter business, founding Great Northern Air Guides, to offer fly-in fishing, hunting, and flightseeing trips in south-central Alaska as well as a flight school, Alaska Air Academy.”

On May 4, 2007, Zerkel was awarded the Wright Brothers Master Pilot Award from the Department of Transportation and Federal Aviation Administration in recognition of more than 50 years of promoting aviation safety within the aviation industry.

“I have been blessed to have a wonderful wife and ten children,” said Gene. “Five girls were born during my first marriage and live in various states with their families. Katherine is a financial aid provider in an Urban Ministry school, Karyn has worked various jobs as an administration assistant and is a professional photographer, Kristina is a nurse working in home health care, Karla also works in the health field, and Karol is a kitchen/bath designer, who has recently started her own business. She now has a contractor license to remodel or build homes in Michigan,” Zerkel said.

The Zerkels have five children who all worked at Alaska Aircraft Sales during their teen years and beyond. His son Ken is vice president of Megapath, Kyle a commercial pilot and Keenan is a helicopter rescue pilot with the U.S. Air Guard and general manager at Alaska Aircraft Sales. Kirk is operations manager at Alaska Interstate Construction. Their daughter, Dr. Kira Zerkel, is a veterinarian in Anchorage.



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